

Chapter 3: How are Remarriage Divorces Different?
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Many chapters begin with a quiz. These are the questions I asked to obtain the information presented in the chapter. Completing each quiz before reading the material should help you understand the section.

Quiz #1: First versus Second Divorce

Q1. Compared with your first divorce, how difficult was your second divorce?

1. ____ Much easier
2. ____ Easier
3. ____ Same
4. ____ Harder
5. ____ Much harder

Q2. How stressful was your life when each of the following occurred? Please use a scale of 0 (no stress at all) to 4 (very heavy stress) to answer this question.

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Before the decision | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 2. Divorce decision | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 3. Separation | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 4. Filing | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 5. Divorce decree | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 6. Now | 0 1 2 3 4 |

Q3. Compared with before the divorce, are you now?

1. ____ Much less happy
2. ____ Less happy
3. ____ About as happy
4. ____ Happier
5. ____ Much happier

Q4. How often do you go over what happened during your recent marriage?

1. ____ All the time
2. ____ Frequently
3. ____ Sometimes
4. ____ Rarely
5. ____ Never

Q6. Which of the following adjectives describe your ex-spouse? (Check all that apply).

1. ____ Dependable
2. ____ Honest
3. ____ Loyal
4. ____ Sincere

Q7. Which of the following best describes your dating or relationship status?

1. ☐ Never date
2. ☐ Date about once a month
3. ☐ Date about 2 to 3 times per month
4. ☐ Date weekly
5. ☐ Going steady
6. ☐ Cohabiting
7. ☐ Engaged
8. ☐ Remarried (date? _____)

Carter's Erased Marriage

Carter pushed the last of thirty paintings into his old, green van and drove off to the weekend art fair. With the help of several of his students, Carter set up his booth. Tom, his most talented art student, pitched a tent in the assigned space. The other students unloaded the van and placed the paintings where Carter directed. Madeline, his wife, would arrive after she dropped off their two youngsters at her sister's house.

No exhibit was successful without Madeline. Of the two, he was the better artist, but she was the promoter. Sociable, she could strike up a lively conversation with anyone. She would make a sale or talk a newspaper reporter into running a piece on one or both. Madeline made sure that the local weekly paper highlighted his work.

Carter's paintings were arranged in sections: early ones drawn in his mid-twenties, a second group painted in his late twenties and early thirties when he was married to Bolta, and his most recent works in a third section. During this last stage, Carter was a teacher at Baldwin High and married to his second wife, Madeline. Waiting for the show to open, Tom turned to Carter and made small talk. "It's really interesting to see your artwork in chronological order," Tom observed.

"I like doing that," Carter responded. "It is fun to see how my art and life have evolved."

"What was going on when you did those dark paintings in the middle?"

"I call that my blue period, Tom. I was getting a divorce from my first wife, Bolta. I hope those sell today."

"Wow. I didn't know you were married before. Thought you and your wife had been together forever."

"Feels like it. I really don't consider my time with Bolta a real marriage. Bolta had a son Max who lived with us. But we never had any children ourselves. We were never close like I am with Madeline. My marriage to Madeline is my only real marriage."

"How did the two of you meet?" Tom asked.

"I was sketching the Tower in Narragansett, Rhode Island on Memorial Day weekend. Madeline came over to me and started criticizing it."

"Really?"

"Yeah, asked me to add color, people, and sunlight. Normally, I would have been irritated and told her off, but I instantly liked her. Next thing I knew, we were traveling every weekend to sketch a different Rhode Island site. In July, we worked side-by-side every day."

"Sounds like fun," Tom interjected.

"By the end of the summer, I asked her to marry me. She said yes, but insisted that I get a full-time job and wait a year before we tied the knot. Baldwin High needed another art teacher. I applied and got the job using her as a reference. The following Memorial Day, we wed in Narragansett. The rest is history, a happy history."

"What ever happened to your first wife? Did she remarry?"

"Her son says that she is happy, loves her job, and has lots of friends and a partner. She has ruled out a third marriage. Doesn't want to do that again," said Carter.

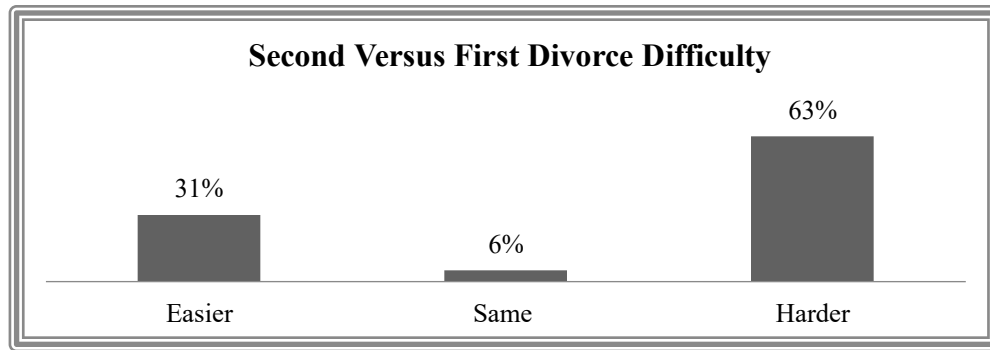


Figure 3-1: Redivorcers with easier, same, or harder second divorce than first.
Note: Adults included 361 (women 215).

Nearly two-thirds said they had a tougher time with their second divorce than their first one. Why did most say this? Almost everyone else came to the opposite conclusion. Who were they?

Erased Marriages

In some respects, a second divorce is a rerun of a first, but in other respects it is not. In both, you and your spouse usually exit with health problems like insomnia and emotional distress such as shaken self-esteem, doubts about your lovability, and diminished confidence in your ability to be happily married. To protect your self-respect, you almost always blame someone else, probably your former partner. Oftentimes, you even blame your ex-spouse for the decision to get married. However, your second split is harder to explain, more discouraging and humiliating, and most people will not treat you with the same empathy and support.

After the first breakup, almost everyone remarries within four years. Before you do, you often decide you will succeed the next time because you are determined not to make the same mistake again. To ensure this, you proceed in one of two ways.

You usually decide you married the wrong type of person—your first spouse is a mismatch. This solution is ideal because it presumes that you are fine, including being loveable, and do not have to change except to make a better marital choice next time. After you come to this conclusion, you single out one or two of your first partner's traits, annoying habits, or his or her occupation so you can find someone with the opposite characteristics.¹ If your first husband is a dependent musician, you might choose a self-reliant engineer. If your first wife is a dark-haired, stay-at-home mom, you may look for a blonde career woman. By doing this, you devalue your first spouse and first marriage.

Sometimes, you go even further and emotionally erase it. You call the first union a pretend marriage. It is a starter marriage, an impulsive mistake, or a “mulligan” that allows you a free do over.

But with the failure of the second marriage, the question now is “Why did I divorce, *again*?” This is a tougher question. This time a satisfactory answer requires that you not only blame the marital end on someone else, but also avoid the stigma and discouragement of a second failure.

After ruminating on this question, adults in my study usually ended up with one of four reactions. The first group was unable to come up with a satisfactory answer, while the other three groups did either by claiming that the two mistakes were different or by erasing one of their unions.

Reaction 1: *Many decided that if they married again, they would fail again.* They could not dodge the second divorce stigma. They were distrustful of others and/or their own decision-

making. These adults almost always decided the disgrace and despair of a second divorce was harder than their first, even when they said they handled the second divorce stress and problems better this time than the first. As long as they held this perspective, they did not want to remarry.

Reaction 2: *A few erased their first marriage before they remarried and continued to do so.* They denied that they had failed twice because they had only been emotionally married once. Typically, these men and women deemed their second divorce was harder, but thought they had a path to a solid remarriage because they had only made one mistake.

Reaction 3: *Some claimed their splits were different—they did not make the same mistake twice.* One husband asserted that his first wife's substance abuse and gambling triggered his original divorce, but his subsequent in-laws' disapproval of him led to his second. Further, he argued that her parents did not want their daughter to marry a divorced man and undermined the marriage. His "situation" caused his second divorce. By asserting that he was not making the same mistake again and blaming others, he refused to take responsibility for the breakups. Many women did the same—they had different reasons for each divorce with the second marriage often impacted by a difficult situation. Men and women who pick this choice may consider the first or second divorce easier for reasons other than their own social skills such as the presence or absence of children, who initiated the divorce, or a reasonable versus unreasonable spouse.

Reaction 4: *The remaining adults said their first union was their only real marriage.* They emotionally erased their second marital tie. Unlike most, their second divorce was the easiest. Who were they?

Parents with children from a long, first marriage, but a brief, childless second marriage often erased their second union and, thus, had easier second breakups. They considered their first relationship their primary or only marital tie because it was the only one that was long and produced children. Moreover, they faulted their teens for their marital woes and subsequent divorce leaving them feeling personally blameless and relatively unperturbed. In contrast, when describing their earliest split, they lost important, real marriages, had upset youngsters, and suffered first-love heartbreaks.

Second-timers, Nickolas and Beth, had teenagers from long, prior marriages when they wed, but no children from their short marriage. The couple blamed their teens' shenanigans for their rocky relationship. When they decided to split, Beth's oldest daughter was delighted, started studying again in high school so her grades improved, dropped her acting-out, rebellious behaviors, and helped her mom get through the ordeal. Nickolas's children from his prior marriage reacted in the same way. Nickolas and Beth considered this split easier than their firsts.

Another woman in the same situation refused to answer the query for her second divorce. Instead, she filled out the form for her first split. Throughout her answer sheet, she crossed off the word second and wrote in FIRST in large print to emphasize the point. Predictably, she had an easy breakup and an easier second divorce than first one. She wrote,

I am answering for my first marriage. My first husband was my only real love and husband. My second marriage doesn't count. It was short and we didn't have any children. We didn't have a true love relationship.

Regardless of what you say, if you're exiting your second marriage, everybody else believes you have made the same mistake twice. As a result, you're almost always in a more difficult, social situation the second time.

A first divorce is common, so, most people don't criticize this breakup, but instead are

empathetic and help you through the process. A second divorce is less common and a repeat act. When you make the same mistake twice, others blame you for the failures. Because they now believe you caused your problems, they may even think you deserve to suffer. They also reason you can handle the breakup by yourself because you have done it before. Thus, in a second divorce, family, friends, and acquaintances are less empathetic, more disapproving of you and your split, and less willing to help you.

Daily Grind—Traditional-firsts versus Seconds

In this section, I compare the stress, challenges, emotional reactions, and recovery of the average first-timer divorcing a once-married spouse (traditional-first) and the average second-timer. By doing so, we get a detailed picture of the multi-divorce process and a better understanding of when and how the two differ.

Remaining half not shown